West Asheville History Project
Interview with Kermit Smith (**KS**) at West Asheville Community Center
January 13, 2001
Bruce Emory (**BE**) and Karen Loughmiller (**KL**)

KL: Saturday, January 13, 2001. This is an interview with Kermit Smith at the West Asheville Community Center.
Mr. Smith, would you tell us your full name and when and where you were born?

KS: My full name is Roy Kermit Smith, Jr., and I was born in the year of nineteen hundred and thirty-six (1936) on January the twenty-ninth in West Virginia in the coal mine fields.

KL: When did your family come to West Asheville?

KS: We came January the nineteenth, 1951.

KL: And what brought you to West Asheville?

KS: Well, my dad had just got laid off. They had closed the mines that he was working at, and they lost their lease—they didn't renew their lease after 20 years, so he had to hunt for (employment). My stepmother was from Asheville,

KL: What did your Dad do?

KS: He graded the coal as the coal came out of the mines; he was called a "dot boss". He stood outside in the rain, sun, or snow, with a piece of chalk in one hand and a pick in another and he went through these coal cars, that they brought out of the mines, to grade it. And if there was any bad coal, or like, rock or dirt, he had to dump it. If it was slate or bone (?) They had to have good soft coal, and they took it to wash it. His job was standing out there grading the coal.

KL: What did he do after you came to Asheville?

KS: Well, he was looking for work, and he went to work for. . .I believe it was Perry Alexander. They put him first clearing the right-of-ways for power lines up on the mountains, through the woods and up on the hills. They went in and cleared brush for power lines. They had the contract to do that for Carolina Power and Light Company. Then he went to work for the Southern Railroad. He was what they used to call the "news butches" on the passenger trains. He sold cigarettes and magazines, and candies and sandwiches. And then his job transferred him to Charlotte (NC) and I stayed here. Of course, I'd finished high school and was making my home in West Asheville. But he went to Charlotte, and from there he went to Cincinatti, Ohio, where he wound up with the Penn Central Railroad, and he retired up there.

KL: Where did you all live when you came to West Asheville?

KS: Out here in West Asheville, 131 Wellington Street.

KL: Wellington Street. And how old were you when your family came (to West A)?

KS: I was 15 when we came down here.

KL: What were your first impressions of West Asheville?

KS: Well, it was large. . .the smallest town I lived in was about a thousand population, so there were very few school students going to the schools. I'd say my class might have had. . .the ninth grade at that time might have had about 30 students or

less, I don't remember. We had a junior high school back then and a senior high school. When I came down here I went to Hall Fletcher and finished up the ninth grade, graduated from Hall Fletcher, then went over to Lee H. Edwards High School and graduated there in 1954.

KL: And was it at that time that you started working at the Palace Pharmacy?

KS: Yes, in December of 1951.

KL: How did you get that job?

KS: Buddies of mine. They were delivering groceries down here at . . . I believe it was Brown's Market on Haywood Road, and another friend of mine that I was in the same class with, he worked at the Palace Pharmacy and he told me that they might need a delivery boy at that time. So I went in the store and talked to Doc Foster. It was during Christmas holidays, 10th of December. I asked him for a job for Christmas, and he said, "Now, if I hire you, it'll be full-time, permanent, because," he said, "we don't have no part-time, you know, outside of you going to school and working of an evening." And I said, "Yes, I'd enjoy that. I'll stay with you." So I stayed 7 years with him.

KL: How many people were employed there while you were working there?

KS: We had about. . .there was one lady working during the day and one pharmacist. And then in the afternoon after school, a couple more of the boys would come in; one would deliver and one would work behind the soda fountain and all through the store as a clerk.

KL: Where was the pharmacy located?

KS: It was in the back of the store, next to the back end of the building there, at this end of the Bledsoe Building, at 783 Haywood Road.

KL: What other merchants were in the Bledsoe Building during that time?

KS: Well, we had Dr. George--he was a dentist—.

BE: Carrell.

KS: Carroll, Dr. George Carrell. He was upstairs. And then they had apartments upstairs too, and I believe they might have had one real estate company upstairs. But mostly it was apartments. Of course, in that Bledsoe Building, from that end of the drug store was. . .let's see, there were two or three businesses. There was French's Variety Store.

KL: Was that on the far end, the other end of the building?

KS: Yes, the other end. And there was Mr. Handte's—he sold parakeets and birds and made peanut butter.

KL: So he had a separate business?

KS: Yes, he had a separate space—store. And I don't know of any other store. Eventually they put a beauty shop in there. But I believe that 5 & 10 cent store, French's, took most of the building. The drug store and French's had most of the building down there in front.

BE: You had doctor located behind—

KS: Yes, Dr. Fay, Dr. S.S. Fay, was in the back on the left side of the building. He had an office there and he had one nurse that worked--Mrs. Breedlove worked for him. And he was just like an old country doctor to me. I mean, we all went

back there to see him if we took a cold or whatever. He was just an MD, a medical doctor, practicing.

KL: Was the Palace Pharmacy open 7 days a week?

KS: Yes, it was.

KL: Was it?!

KS: We closed, though. We opened up at 8:30, and Doc Foster went to church—at that time he was going to. . . I believe it was West Asheville Baptist Church—and he would close from 11:00 til 12:00, so we could go down to church. . .

KL: Now that's interesting.

KS: . . .and come back. Of course, that didn't give him much time for lunch breaks, or anything like that. You come back from church and opened back up and caught the church crowd. They wanted a sundae or soda, milkshake or a Coke.

KL: So you worked all day Saturday, and almost all day Sunday.

KS: Yes sir, 14 hours, open til close, from 8:30 of a morning til 11:15 at night.

KL: How much did he pay you?

KS: We started out. . .I think it was 35 cents an hour; I believe that was when I was delivering. And then he went up to 50 cents an hour when we got trained behind the soda fountain.

KL: Tell us about delivering.

KS: Well, that's interesting because we took out ice cream—we'd have to hurry up and rush the ice cream out before it melted! And we delivered prescriptions. We went nearly halfway down Haywood Road to State Street and down to Amboy Road, down near the end of Wellington Street. I knew where all them streets was. And then we went out this end up to Malvern Hills. We took—at that time we had Sulphur Springs; it was sort of like a. . . not a rest home, but it was a home for the people. . .it originally started out with tuberculosis (patients).

KL: Oh, OK. A sanitarium.

KS: A sanitarium, yes. It was called Zephyr Hills Sanitarium.

BE: Was that on Shelburne Road?

KS: Shelburne Road. Right where Trinity Baptist Church is, on the same grounds, where the church is setting today.

KL: So you can remember. . .the building was still standing when you came to West Asheville?

KS: Oh yes. We had I don't know how many patients that we had the prescription business for out there—maybe 6 or 8 or 10 I know of.

KL: So. . .did you make a regular weekly delivery out there?

KS: No, every day.

KL: Every day?

KS: We went out there about 5 o'clock.

BE: How long did it take you to go from the Palace out to Zephyr Hills?

KS: You know, I never did time it that close. I would say on a bicycle—you've seen the picture, it's a little front wheel and a big back wheel—and of course we went down Sandhill Road off of Haywood Road—I would say, less than ten minutes to get out there.

KL: So when you did that, were you on a route—you were delivering at. . .I don't know. . .a bunch of places--?

KS: Well, sometimes we had customers out that way and we'd go ahead and drop their orders off. But then again we might have to go back out near there before the end of the night, in the evening. We'd go in after school, I think we went in about a quarter to five or five o'clock and stayed til eleven fifteen. Of course, when we got behind the soda fountain we had to wash all the glasses, the sundae and soda glasses again, and set them down on the back of the bar there on a towel to drain them.

BE: That's such a different type thing now—you know, we've got McDonald's and all that today. Sort of explain how you made the carbonated drinks and milkshakes and all—the procedure that you went through.

KS: Well, we had the tanks of gas that made the carbonation and we knew when they were getting low—the water wouldn't run freely. It was like a steady stream of water if the gas wasn't in there. If it was running low, it would be just like turning the faucet on with cold or hot water. To get a fizz out of it, if it had the full amount of gas in the system in the carbonation water spigot, you would get that sensation like air coming out. We had to have that kind of fizz in the carbonation water to make the sodas.

BE: Did you just put the syrup in?

KS: Yes, chocolate, or strawberry flavor—we had several different flavors of sodas—strawberry, and cherry. .

KL: So you kept busy doing that?

KS: Yes, that was interesting work. And before I came there, I'd say in the late 40s, they had curb service, outside on the curb.

KL: Really?!

KS: Yes, and we still had some of the trays they carried out the orders on.

KL: Where did the people park?

KS: On the side of the building or across Mildred Avenue or nearby there, I suppose. I never did catch curb (service) like that when I started.

BE: Now when you made the milkshakes you had to actually hand-dip the ice cream?

KS: Yes, everything was real. . .I mean, there wasn't no mixes like they have today—milkshake mixes like these fast food services. . .restaurants. It was all handmade. You measured out the syrup, added the milk, and put the scoops of vanilla ice cream in. We used real ice cream in the beginning and then we had what they called the ice milk milkshake mix. It was low-fat, like a low-fat milkshake base. It was for low fat.

BE: How did you mix all the ingredients?

KS: We put it in the Hamlet Bleacher(? Hamilton Beach???)

KL: What is that?

KS: It stirs it—it's like a mixer. . .

KL: It's like a blender?

KS: It's like a blender. Only it had stem. And it went around and around and beat the ice cream and syrup and all that.

BE: If I remember correctly, you could get more than one milkshake on that blender, could you not?

KS: Yes, we had a double one: we could make two at one time on that blender. It's called a Hamilton Bleach (Hamilton Beach?) or something like that, the machine is. But it had a stem, just like a mixer to mix egg whites or something like that.

KL: What were the busiest times for you all?

KS: Well, we had rushes before dinner, and on Sundays especially, after church. But Saturdays it was just steady, especially early of a morning-- you'd have your coffee people come in—we'd make coffee, and we had ready-made sandwiches and doughnuts and things like that.

KL: Did you have tables in there?

KS: We had three tables and four chairs around each table; they sat nearly in back of the store. We didn't have any stools at the counter. They'd order and then go back and take a table.

BE: What was the counter like?

KS: It was marble; made out of marble. It was beautiful. The top of it and the front side of it were made out marble, and you don't see that anymore.

KL: You sure don't.

KS: And of course, I remember how many drug stores we had on Haywood Road.

KL: Well I wanted to ask you how many drug stores were here. . .

KS: We had eight, starting at Beecham Curve down there.

KL: What was down there?

KS: Carolina Pharmacy.

KL: Where was that?

KS: It was on the left as you go down, where the beauty shop is now--there used to be a uniform store down there, Hupp Uniform Store—Mr. And Mrs. Shieder, Doc Shieder owned that. And coming back this way, we had West Asheville Pharmacy. Doc Foster eventually bought that and closed it down, and he bought the Ideal Drug Store, and he sold it to Mr. Crouch.

BE: Where was the West Asheville Pharmacy located?

KS: I think it was down there. . . I'm getting ahead of myself, but it was down there past Bennett's Drug Store, coming up on this side of the street. Or let's see, maybe it was down past B & B Pharmacy. Let's see if I can name them over in order, like I used to tell everybody: Carolina Pharmacy, then the West Asheville Pharmacy; B & B Pharmacy, which is still here—the only one out of eight; then we had Bennett's Drug Store

KL: And that was. . .?

KS: Across from the Shell Station. . .

KL: OK.

KS: And we had Pinner's. . .

KL: And that was. . .

KS: Out there at the little shopping center. . .

BE: At State Street.

KL: Mike's Auto Parts. . .

KS: Right in front of State Street. That was Pinner's Drug Store. And then we had the Ideal Drug Store. We had the Palace Rexall Pharmacy, which is the store I worked for, and then out here at Malvern Hills Pharmacy, Mr Sisk, Bill Sisk owned it. That was eight stores on Haywood Road. These were all not chain stores, either; these were family, just like our grocery stores used to be. May's Market, and Brown's Market, used to be just family-owned businesses—it wasn't chain stores.

KL: Well, was it a competitive business, or how did you all get along with the other places?

KS: Well, I think we had customers from here to Enka, Candler, and even out in Emma, and out towards Leicester—they came from the county. We did a good business—we sold veterinarian supplies. And I believe we were the only store in West Asheville that sold the supplies. Somebody talked us into it, to try it out—putting in a shelf and a display. And it caught on. We did maybe a little advertising on the radio. There was another store over in Asheville, I believe, Barefoot and Tatum, I believe that they handled that. Otherwise you went to, you know, a hardware store or something like that—a feed and seed store, to get your veterinarian supplies. It did real well in the late 50s.

KL: Let me ask you something—did you all deliver prescriptions in the Burton Street area? Or did African-Americans. . .did they shop at not only the Palace, but anywhere along Haywood Road?

KS: You know, I was thinking about that and I don't believe they did. I don't know where they traded; seems like we did have black people, though., to come in and pick up their medicine. They had a pharmacy over in town, over there what they call The Block now, down on Eagle Street somewhere. Most people (and I guess they delivered) most people traded with their own color at that time—which at that time, you know, was segregated.

BE: Describe Doc Foster.

KS: Well, to me, I was scared of him at first. He was sort of. . .when I started, like I say, I was fifteen going on sixteen, and he. . .he was a bald-headed man, and that made him look more distinguished, like a doctor, or some businessman/ But he seemed like he wanted to be friends with you—with his employees, I'm talking about—but yet, you know, you were kind of scared to sit down and talk to him, because you didn't know if he wanted to talk to you or not. But everybody loved him, who came in there. Of course, he went to church, like I say, and he just reminded me of somebody, you know, that I wanted not to get to close to at first, because I didn't know how to take him. But he had a lot of friends who came in and sat down and talked to him and visited with him, 20, 30 minutes to an hour. After knowing him there, I. . .you know, I started talking to him, and first thing you know, he was just like a father to me, really. Yet he wasn't that old at that time. Everybody said he looked older, but I would say when I started with him he was probably in his 40s. He had graduated from the University of North Carolina School of Pharmacy and then went up to Washington, D.C., to Peoples' Pharmacy and worked there for awhile. Then he came back down here and got the Palace

Pharmacy.

KL: Was he from West Asheville?

KS: He was born over in Leicester.

KL: So he was from right around here.

KS: The Mount Carmel area over there. He lived on the old home place over there on Smith's Cemetary Road.

KL: Did he have a family?

KS: No, he finally got married at a later age, and his wife passed away with cancer. But he went with his wife I guess fifteen years before they got married. He got married at a late age and built a new home over there off of Mount Carmel Road.

KL: Did he establish the Palace Pharmacy or did he buy that?

KS: It seems like he bought that from somebody which I'm not familiar with. I didn't know, because he was there when I moved here and I didn't really know the other owner.

BE: I believe you said he always wore a sun visor?

KS: A sun visor. He had like a crick in his neck, and he couldn't look straight up. And he had to turn his whole body around when he had somebody sitting over here beside him or behind him to talk to him. He drove his car that way: when he had to make a turn in the car he had to turn his head.

BE: Did he smoke?

KS: No, he didn't. I never seen a cigarette in that man's mouth as long as I knew him.

BE: A lot of doctors and druggists during that era did smoke.

KS: Well, he had plenty of opportunity, but I never seen a cigarette in that man's mouth.

KL: What kind of car did he drive?

KS: A Cadillac.

KL: Oh he did?

KS: The last one was a '51, I believe. Everybody tried to buy that one off of him. It was a long time before he would let me drive it!

KL: He did let you drive it?! What were you driving it for?

KS: I had car trouble one time, we were delivering. . .we had these Rexall 1-cent sales –buy one at the regular price and get another one for a penny. Even my school teachers, they'd want stationery, something like that, they would tell me to save them so much stationery or what have you that was a Rexall product. We did real well with that, it lasted a long time. Even the Ideal Drug Store, when they bought the Ideal from the Palace, from Doc Foster, they kept the Rexall products in it, even had a sign on the side of the building.

KL: Where did you get the ice cream? What kind of ice cream did you all use?

KS: Borden's Ice Cream. It's ironic that I would go to work at Biltmore Dairy.

KL: What did you enjoy most about that job?

KS: Well, meeting the people. When I first came there, I had no, what you might say, business personality. I was even afraid to walk up to a customer and say, "May I help you?" Coming from West Virginia, it was a small area and not many people and there wasn't that much entertainment at that time back in the late 40s and

early 50s, you know, to get to meet people outside of your school friends. And it was amazing how I just caught on to talking to people, you know, when they wanted to know where I came from and all that. And then it was so that they couldn't shut me up then!

BE: I notice in one of these pictures you have a uniform—what looks like a white uniform—on. . .?

KL: The store furnished the jackets. They sent them out every week to the laundry, I think it was National Linen, or whoever they sent them to, and I bought the white pants and the white shoes, so I really looked sharp in that drug store! They always called me "Doc Smith"! But that was what the drug store furnished, was the jackets. I bought the white pants and some shoes too.

BE: You always wore that when you worked?

KS: Yes. Or an apron. We didn't have long jackets, we wore an apron too.

KL: When you were delivering?

KS: No, we'd take the apron off when we were out delivering; we'd wear the white jacket. I had already learned to ride the **bicycle**, and it had a big basket in the front where we could put our merchandise—prescriptions and ice cream.

KL: Did you deliver after dark?

KS: Well, yes, but we knew where we were going. The streets were pretty well lit, where we could find the houses alright—we'd been there before.

KL: How about traffic?

KS: You know there wasn't that much traffic like that back then. We had to watch crossing the street. But I didn't even own a car til I finished high school. It was a couple of months after I graduated before I was able to buy my first car.

KL: What was your first car?

KS: A Chevrolet.

KL: Where'd you get it?

KS: I bought it on Coxe Avenue, from a Ford used car lot—Riley Smith.

KL: What kind of car did you get?

KS: A 40 model Chevrolet. It was 14 years old at that time.

BE: And what year was that?

KS: 1954. I graduated from Lee H. Edwards on June the 4th of 1954.

BE: Then you continued to work at the Palace. . .

KS: Until January the 25th (1959). I closed up the store that Sunday night, and 26th, the next morning, I was hired down at Biltmore Dairy Farm.

BE: And that was what year?

KS: 1959.

BE: So you worked 5 years after you graduated from school, is that right?

KS: Yes, that's true.

BE: Was that full-time?

KS: Full-time. He called me in and wanted to know if I was wanting to stay or leave him, and I said well, some friends of mine wanted to go up and work in the automobile factory up in Detroit. And he said, "Well, I wish you wouldn't do that."

He said, "You get laid off, you know, after the cars are on the market and they start selling them in October. You'll probably get laid off. You won't have a job in the wintertime." I said, "Well, we thought about that, too." He said, "I'll tell you what: I can't afford to pay you any more than we're paying you now, but I can give you more hours." So I wound up working 7 days a week. I would complain today about working 7 days a week, Saturdays and Sundays.

BE: Did you work the day and evening shift both?

KS: I did that too. . .they let me off two nights a week. I worked the night shift the week nights. I got Wednesday and Friday nights off, but I opened up the store days, in the mornings, and stayed til 5:00

KL: Did some of your friends go to Detroit?

KS: Seems like they did, but I can't recall their names now. They did leave because they couldn't find work here, and the ones that were wanting to work here, they hadn't gotten their military obligation over with. Back then, you got drafted, like I did about 3 months after I went to work at Biltmore Dairy. They knew I was in 1-A to be drafted anytime. I had one year to the day after my physical until I did get drafted. But Biltmore hired me anyway, because it happened to one of their zone managers the same way. They hired him and he had to go in, during the Korean War.

BE: Going back a little way, you mentioned a person who told you about the job at the Palace. Do you remember the person who originally told you that?

KS: It could have been Bobby Shook. He lives down in Spartanburg, South Carolina Now. I haven't talked to him in several years, but he worked there. Ed Smith, Bill Wilson were there at the time I started work there, and of course, Bobby Shook. We went to school together. He was in the Navy Reserve.

BE: What were some of the names of the people who worked there during your time there?

KS: Well, I was thinking about that this morning. We had three that made preachers, and two highway patrolmen. There's two preachers that are passed away already, as young as that. Dr. Fred Warehan that was ordained over here at the West Asheville Baptist Church—he retired a couple of years ago. He worked there.

----------Telephone Interruption----------

We had two highway patrolmen, one may be retired now, the other one finally quit.

----------Telephone Interruption----------

There were several that went on that went in the service. I remember Eldridge Fox. He owned-- he's the owner of the Kingsmen Quartet. He worked with about a year. We were talking about that just before he had his heart attack and stroke again a few months ago.

BE: Was he from West Asheville?

KS: He was from Sandhill—he went to Sandhill High School. He lived down there off of Sandhill Road somewheres.

BE: I believe you talked about some ladies that worked in there?

KS: Yes. The ladies worked during the daytime. . .Mrs. Helen Seay, she just passed away a couple of weeks ago. And there's one still living. She used to work down at the Hot Shot Café. I don't know if she's quit working yet or not. Her name was May Ramey. She lived down here off of Sandhill Road—Dallas Road or Street or something, pretty close by. That was the only two women that we had, and they opened up the store. I worked with one of them, the two nights I got off, Wednesday morning and Friday morning. But other times I was there at nighttime til closing time. That seems like a long time to stay open, you know, at night nowdays. Of course, these shopping centers, they close about ten. . .malls. But we stayed open til 11:15. It would be about 11:30 when I would get everything cleaned up and get ready to go out. Then I still had to get up and go to school the next morning or I wouldn't graduate.

BE: Did most of the drug stores in West Asheville stay open that long?

KS: 10:30 or 11:00 (p.m.), I'm sure.

KL: Were you there by yourself?

KS: No, we had a pharmacist—Doc Foster was there, or Dr. Riley or Dr. Ingle.

KL: So they all put in those same long hours?

KS: Yes, they took turns about working. And then when Doc Foster couldn't get anybody to work for him back there—you had to be a licensed pharmacist to fill prescriptions—there were several druggists that didn't have their license, but they had to have somebody with them.

KL: So they got orders. . . people called in their?. . . Doctors called in prescriptions?

KS: Yes, or they'd bring their refills in.

BE: The last salary that I heard you talking about was 50 cents an hour. . .?

KS: 50 cents an hour.

BE: Did you get above that at some point in time?

KS: Seems like the last year or two. . .I believe I worked my way up to 75 cents an hour. That wouldn't even buy you a cup of coffee today would it?!

BE: This was 1959. . .somewhere between '57 and '59?

KS: Yes. And you know, I laid my clothes away—I couldn't go buy them. See, I paid my own way through high school.

KL: Well, tell us about the rest of your life while you were working at the Palace Pharmacy. What else was going on?

KS: Well, there just wasn't much entertainment. We had two theaters out here on Haywood Road, and one of them closed down—the Palace. Then we had the Isis Theater. And of course, bowling. There was a bowling alley over on Merrimon Avenue, the ABC. There was one down in Biltmore, next to Giezentanner's—I mean Trantham's—food store down there in that area.

BE: Did you attend any of the theaters?

KS: Every weeekend, yes. A matinee when I was off, Friday nights, mostly. Wednesday or Friday nights. And bowling and the movies was about all the entertainment a young person (had). . .of course, we didn't have this big Patton Avenue down here to run up and down. We had Tunnel Road and Wink's, and Babe Malloy's, and Buck's Restaurant.

BE: Do you remember the price to get in the theater?

KS: I remember the last was 15 cents. Up in West Virginia we'd go the matinee on Saturday afternoons or Sunday afternoons. . .we'd pick up soda pop bottles and sell them for a penny a bottle, get nine cents or ten cents. Nine cents, I believe, was the cheapest. I know I remember 15 cents at the Isis.

BE: You were talking about the matinee. What did the matinee consist of?

KS: Well, it started early, around two or three o'clock in the afternoon, and they had another one at night, about seven or eight o'clock.

BE: Was there just the movie or were there other features?

KS: Well, during that time they showed the Korean War newsreels about what was going on, just like your ABC or CNN news. They'd show a few minutes of the news, which you'd probably read in the paper the morning before, but they had it on film. And they showed previews of the coming attractions. And of course, you could take a dollar and get sick on eating candy and popcorn! Or a hot dog was probably 5 or t10 cents. . .a bag of popcorn was probably 10 cents.

BE: What about cartoons?

KS: Yes, they did show Walt Disney or Bugs Bunny or Donald Duck, they'd show them, maybe ten minutes.

BE: Were they still showing the serial or "continued" pictures, a lot of people called them, in those times?

KS: Yes, and some of them were westerns, mostly. But I was always interested in just the western pictures.

BE: Were there one or two features?

KS: One.

KL: These celebrities—did they mostly come to the old City Auditorium?

KS: Yes, they did. Or to the theaters.

BE: Did some come to the theaters here?

KS: I didn't ever see any out here on Haywood Road. It was over in town, the Paramount Theater or down on Biltmore Avenue, the Strand. They had stage shows at least once a month. I even saw Frankenstein one time, the man who played Frankenstein. He was here. And then Red Ryder, he was here, and often we'd write to them. I'd get their address from Hollywood, California, and I would write to them, and they would send me an autographed picture.

KL: Who went with you to see these movies?

KS: Well, sometimes I'd go by myself, and sometimes my closest buddies that I went to school with or worked with, one or two of them would be interested in going. And sometimes my brother. . .he's three years younger than I am, and he likes John Wayne. He never did get to see John Wayne. I got to see Tex Ritter here (when the new civic center opened up, back in the 70s) before he passed away.

BE: Tex Ritter?

KS: Yes. And Alan Rocky????? He always came in the 50s. And Charles Starrett, that played the Durango Kid. There was quite a few that came. And later on, after they retired and started drawing their social security, they told me—Lash Larue told me, he said, "We have to go out and make a little extra money. We

BE: Do you remember what kind of movies you saw in the theaters?

KS: I liked—and they showed, mostly—westerns, "B" movies. Black and whites, low budget movies. And I met some of the cowboys that were the film stars, that came through Asheville. That was what was so neat about Asheville and West Asheville—you had more people like celebrities, entertainers, that would come here. I didn't see anybody up in West Virginia.

BE: Who are you speaking of. . . maybe somebody that came through West Asheville?

KS: Lash Larue.

BE: Where did he come?

KS: Bill Hagan had the Film—Western-- Film Festival.

KL: Tell me about that.

KS: He would have all the cowboys that were still living. I've seen Sunset Carson, and the boy that played Sugarfoot, and Mark Crawford, that played on "The Rifleman", and a lot of the (cowboy stars). Of course we have a movie star That retired, Dorothy Hart, that lives over in Beaver Lake. She would come, because she played in some westerns—I think she played in maybe about sixteen. films.

BE: Who was your favorite actor?

KS: Western?

BE: Western.

KS: I sort of liked. . . of course Roy Rogers and Gene Autry's always everybody's favorite, and I got to see Gene Autry one time at the old City Auditorium. . . but I would have to say Lash Larue, and Monte Hellman. They used to come through. And I'd see Red Ryder over there in town at the Paramount Theater—

BE: Right.

KS: --over there on Spruce Street, where Blanton's Business College (was). . .

BE: Parking lot now.

KS: Yes, it's a parking lot now. I went to Blanton's on the GI Bill, later on. I got two and a half years; I got a degree in Business and I went through Junior Accounting on the GI Bill.

BE: You mentioned Bill Hagan. He was a West Asheville (resident). ...?

KS: Yes, well, he graduated from Erwin. He's called "Crazy" Bill—Crazy Bill's Auction. . .

BE: Right. He had the business out-

KS: Out on Haywood Road.

BE: --about where Roses used to be, I guess.

KS: Yes. And that was the first --not changing the subject—but about my celebrities ; of course, I've got Elvis Pressley's autograph. Anybody like that, that I saw here, I'd go get their picture or autograph, you know, and that was a hobby of mine—taking pictures, getting celebrities', or cowboys', or television stars' autographs, and I've got several that I hold on to that I've collected. But Roses store, the first (Roses) store in Asheville was on Haywood Road. Barbara Watts came up here from Georgia and was the manager of it. She married Johnny Watts, he was raised up out here in West Asheville.

don't get enough social security. He said, "We only got paid maybe—" (He was talking about "Rambo" at that time, making millions of dollars, eleven million dollars for one film.) He said these "B" movies, what they call "low budget"—they were black and white—they wouldn't take over three or four days to film them. (They ran) an hour, hour and twenty minutes, an hour and a half for a feature film and they would make about three thousand dollars.

BE: Which probably, though, wasn't bad money. . .in the 40s and 50s.

KS: Back then, no. No, it wasn't. Of course, you'd have to film, you know, every month; every year you'd have to film at least half a dozen or more. And then the personal appearances—their managers, road managers, took them out, you know, and they got a percentage off of what was paid at the theaters that they went to, something like that. But Asheville had, even back then, they had a lot to offer to people, even young people, to all the people in Buncombe County.

BE: Do you remember who managed the Isis theater?

KS: No, I don't. I don't even remember who was upstairs that run the projector. I would like to own one of them old movie projectors. It would be a fine antique to hold on to and talk about.

KL: It sure would. I know you're interested in gospel music. When did you get interested in that, and how did you get interested in it?

KS: Back in the early 50s, I guess I was still in high school, Doc Foster. . .he was a promoter of the all-night sings at the old city auditorium; Riley Smith and him were good friends. Riley was always a car salesman, and Riley had a quartet named the "Tonemasters" and he got to talking to Doc Foster and said, "Why not let's have a sing here once a month, and we'll have different groups come in." He said, "I believe we can fill up the auditorium. People love to hear gospel music, even outside the church." And he said, "We sing in my church, you know, as a quartet." So Doc Foster backed him up with the money; they rented the old city auditorium and they would ask like, The Statesmen, "How much would you charge us for a concert tonight or next Saturday night?" They would give them a price, and they always had a full house—two thousand, 22-2300, even back then; years ago, that was a good crowd.

BE: Was it actually an all-night singing?

KS: Well, it would last. . .I've set up til 3:00 in the morning. As long as people would stay there, them singers would come back and sing another round. They would sing their 35, 45 minutes, maybe an hour. . .Blackwood Brothers one night, and another group, and Riley Smith's quartet, and then the next month would be The Statesmen out of Atlanta, Georgia, and another group, and then Riley Smith's Tonemasters, the host quartet, would always perform. And people loved it too.

BE: Riley Smith lived in West Asheville.

KS: Yes, down here off of. . . his wife still lives down here on Herron Avenue, off Haywood Road.

BE: Do you sing, yourself?

KS: No.

KL: No.

KS: I did, after my mother passed away. My aunt would take us to her church, and my

sister and I would sing. She'd teach us songs and we'd sing Sunday mornings, by a piano or somebody playing the guitar. But that's been 55 years ago now, 54 years ago, and we never did get back together to sing anymore. I sure do love to sit down and listen.

KL: What are some of your favorite songs?

KS: Well . . .we tried singing Squire Parson's "Beulah Land" at my company party and dinner where I work, in the office. And of course, I like the old standards. Stamp Baxter, music out of his book, like "In the Sweet By and By" and "Cross Over River Jordan" and "Cabin by the Hill". . .just right now, off the top of my head, I'm just blank.

KL: I'm putting you on the spot!

KS: Yes, I wasn't prepared or I would of wrote down some of them—it would have been a whole sheet full of them. I can't remember, my sister and I, what we did sing, but my aunt would take a hymnal book and we'd learn a song out of the book, and play maybe two songs on Sunday mornings.

BE: Back in the days of the all-night singings in the old auditorium, who was your favorite quartet, and who's your favorite quartet today?

KS: Well, I always cared for The Statesmen, cause I'd get to talk to them. Hobie Lester, he was a preacher and he played the piano; he owned The Statemen. And of course, now these ones that are not as old as the Blackwood Brothers, Statesmen, I would say The Inspirations, and of course, The Kingsmen. My wife graduated with Ray Dean Reese in high school that sings bass. He's been with them about 35 years. And of course I knew Eldridge Fox that started them back in the early 60s. But the local groups, I would say. . .I love the Primitive Quartet, The Kingsmen, and The Inspirations over here in Bryson City. North Carolina's Got quite a few gospel groups. And family groups, I follow several from my Home state of West Virginia.

KL: Did lots of folks from West Asheville go to these all-night sings?

KS: Yes, I'd see people up there. . .Doc'd let me work upstairs and pay me four dollars a night just to watch the balcony doors, not let anybody go in or out.

---------- Break to change tape----------

The mixed groups, like family groups, you know, The Hays Family from Boone, and the The Greens, and of course, up in West Virginia, The Conners. . .I've got pictures of them out there in the car now that they sent me at Christmas, and made some down at Spartanburg last month when I was with them down there. Counting North Carolina I've been in five states with them in their concerts.

KL: Do you help with the shows? Have you?

KS: I've done babysitting, and helped setting up. . .the little girl now is 4 years old. We was talking about that down there at Spartanburg last month. Preacher said when was the last time that they'd been down there? I said, "Well, the baby was two months old. She was born in December and was down there in February." I said. "It'll be almost 4 years—this February'll be 4 years since they've been down

there. They've been down there three times since I've known them in the last 8 years, I guess. They're from up in the central part of the state, southern West Virginia, near Charleston, a little bit west of Charleston in the center part of the state. About an hour and a half drive from where I was raised up. And then the Paris (?) Sisters, they're from Huntington. And there's other groups up there. And of course, I followed Martha Carson, I've got some pictures of her out there in the car now, where the Conners got to sing with her in Kentucky last year. Carolyn got to meet Martha. I hadn't seen them in the 50s. A parttime job I had, talking about that, of course Martha Carson was over at McCormick Field. . .before I went to work at the drug store, in the summertime, April '51, I got a job at McCormick Field as a vendor, and that was interesting. Of course, at that time the Asheville Tourists was the farm team of the Brooklyn Dodgers ball club, before they went out to Los Angeles. So my first day was on Sunday afternoon, and I was still in the 9th grade, and they had an exhibition game on the next day on Monday at 1:00. The Dodgers was coming up from their winter training down in Florida. . .on their way up they was going to stop and play us an exhibition game before they went up to Brooklyn. So I got to meet Jackie Robinson and all the ball players. . .Pee Wee Reese and Gil Hodges. . .Roy Campanella was captain(?). We sold out of everything at the bottom of the first inning! We got out of school. There was several of us that had to get out. Mr. Hunt, down here at Hall Fletcher, the principal, he didn't want to let us out. I said, "Well, it's my job—I've got to be there."

BE: Tell us something—what did you think about Mr. Hunt, down at Hall Fletcher?

KS: You know, like I say, I was down there in January, about this time in January, til I graduated in May or June. I really didn't get to know him that well, but I liked him. I mean, I knew he was strict, and some of my friends said, "Oh, he's a mean principal." But I said, "He hasn't never bothered me, and I haven't never give him any trouble—and that's the way I want to leave it, don't you know?" But I liked him. I got over there at Lee Edwards, and O.L. Norman was their principal.

BE: Do you remember what Mr. Hunt looked like?

KS: Yes, yes. Tall man, bald head, very distinguished looking man, always wore a nice suit—tweed suit in the wintertime, you know, and I respected him because you know, that was the first principal I'd met when I came to Asheville. He was my first principal at that first school.

KL: Were the schools here different from what you were used to in West Virginia in any way particularly?

KS: Some of the classes might have been a little bit different, but it was the same schedule. We had, you know, English—we had a certain time, maybe one hour; we had physical ed. I took music—never did learn to read music, but I had to sing a song at the end of that quarter.

KL: What did you sing?

KS: "The Tennessee Waltz"!

KL: Oh, that's a great song!

KS: All these boys, you know, they said, "You'll never do it." I said, "Well, I'm going to try because I know I'll get an A if I complete it." And these big old boys, what would later be in later years football players and basketball players—I never did play no sports, I always had to work, and I didn't get to play anything, and I was small, too, for my age, light. . . .I got up there and I finished it. They applauded. Some of them boys got up there and tried to sing their song and turned red and almost passed out! But I'd had that experience in church, my aunt teaching my sister and I, after my mother passed away.

KL: So you did sing in church?

KS: Yes, we sung for maybe a year or so.

BE: Do you remember any of the teachers—their names—at Hall Fletcher, when you were going there?

KS: You know, I'm blank about that now. Of course, we had some new teachers that came there, and I think one of them went over to Lee Edwards—she was an English teacher. . .Miss Sylvie. Her husband was a policeman, John Sylvie. I remember her being there. Mrs. Airheart, she was a new teacher that came there and she finally went over to Lee Edwards. But you know, I can't place any more right now. I do know most all of them—I look in my annual every once in a while, and a lot of them's passed away.

BE: Were the "Mighty Mites" going on when you were there?

KS: Oh yes! My brother, Joe, that you've got a picture of, he played for Hall Fletcher, and they played David Millard, you know, and that was always a big rival. And of course Lee Edwards, they played Charlotte, East Mecklenburg, and they played . . .probably Hickory. I've got a schedule at home of the teams that they played. You know, the schedule started in September, til December.

BE: That's Lee Edwards you're referring to?

KS: Lee Edwards, Lee H. Edwards. That school was named after one of the first principals. And then they went back in the 60s, back to Asheville High. We were called the Maroon Devils. Now I think its--

BE: The Cougars.

KS: --the Cougars. They was wanting to name it the Bears, Black Bears or something like that, and then they chose the cougar, they went with that. The Maroon Devils is over in Bryson City now—they're one of the teams at one of the schools over there.

BE: The Mighty Mites were actually a combination, Millard/Fletcher, of David Millard and Hall Fletcher schools.

KS: When they went to the high school. But we had two different teams—Hall Fletcher had their own team, and David Millard had their own—9th graders, 8th graders. See, your senior high school was 10th, 11th, and 12th. That was just the way it was up in West Virginia.

KL: Did you have a church here in West Asheville?

KS: Yes, I started going to church at Calvary Baptist, and now I'm going to Deaverview Baptist on Johnston Boulevard.

BE: Who was the minister when you started at Calvary?

KS: Reverend Lane, John Lane. His daughter went to school with me, she was one year ahead of me, Jean Lane, she was ahead of me one year in high school. And then we had John Knight. And then they've got Buddy Corbin now. My son, his wife and her family, that's their church.

BE: So that's the only two churches you've attended?

KS: Yes. Of course, I've visited about all of them, doing the gospel singings! I guess it didn't make no difference what denomination, just so it was a gospel concert that morning or that night.

BE: So your church life's always been in West Asheville?

KS: Yes, yes it has. I have friends that go to First Baptist Church that live out here in West Asheville or that live in Malvern Hills. . .maybe some were Methodists. . but denomination don't mean a thing as long as you're in church.

KL: When you were in high school, your Dad had these jobs, so he was traveling a lot

KS: Yes.

KL: You and your brother looked after yourselves, cooked for yourselves. . .?

KS: No, our stepmother was home with us. He had a job of, you know, going out of town traveling. . .we would. . .the train came through here, stopped down there where the old Depot Street is, that was the old depot down there, we'd go over and see him while the train picked up passengers—it was a passenger train.

KL: So, he'd just be here very shortly. . .?

KS: Yes, he had a run to Greensboro, and down to South Carolina-- Charleston, or up north, Cincinatti or Indiana—he'd run a lot up in Indiana.

BE: When you were a kid and you went over to the city, over to Asheville, how did you get over there?

KS: We rode the bus. That's another good thing to think about. Now, you'd buy your bus tickets, 5 cents a ride—10 cent a day you could ride to town and back. Pick up your school bus there at Pritchard Park for the high school. Bought 50 cents worth of tickets and you'd ride 5 days, school days, back and forth.

BE: What transportation company had the bus system at that time?

KS: It was the brothers. . .White's, White's Transportation.

KL: Where did you catch the bus?

KS: We'd walk up to the top of the street up there at Haywood Road. We lived on Wellington Street and we'd just go up to the top of the street up at the bus stop up there at the corner of Wellington and Haywood Road. And of course, down at Hall Fletcher, just walk across the street—we lived right in front of the school. You could come home for lunch, you know, you didn't have to eat at school! We had 20 minutes, 30 minutes, we'd just walk on home, get us a hot bowl of soup or a sandwich or something and then go back before the bell rang. Of course later on in high school, 10th, 11th, 12th grade, I had friends that drove and sometimes their parent would take them to school; I'd just step out in the yard wait on somebody to come down Wellington Street because that went around the river, you know, back behind the high school. I had no problems getting there—getting to school—even though I didn't own my own car. Of course, there were very few cars that you'd see parked out there in the parking lot. It's not like to-

day, you'd see hundreds of cars out there. They don't even have room for them now, I guess.

KL: Did most of your friends have after-school jobs?

KS: Yes they did. Most of them weren't wealthy, or (didn't) come from a wealthy family, they were just average working families, and if they wanted a car or something, they worked for it.

KL: And were there jobs for them to have?

KS: Well, not so many, because there again, you had to serve in the military first off. For a plant like Enka. . .I know my uncle tried to get me on at the Dayton Rubber Plant, which is closed down now, he was a fire chief over in Waynesville. . .I had the chief of police, the fire chief, and the sheriff over there giving me a good reference, you know, but they said, "You've got a good reference, a good working (record) and all that, where you've worked, but our best advice if you want a good job, go on in and get your military behind you." They were explaining to me that it cost several thousand dollars, fifty thousand dollars at that time, to train a person, and they didn't want to lose one; after they'd finished their training and started working they wouldn't want to retrain again, and I can see that. I mean, that's just business.

BE: Let's go back to the Palace. Who were some of the most memorable people that you knew or that you remember, or some things that happened that made them memorable?

KS: Well, our customers, they were real friendly...I'd be afraid to name some because I'd be afraid I'd leave out some, don't you know. When they saw you stayed there a long time, they took an interest in you and they would help you, you know, to get a job or get credit, anything like that. I know down there at Cobbles' Department Store, I got credit and bought my first suit to graduate with, (well, it was a sport jacket). He gave me a reference, Mr. Michael did, Ed Michael gave me a reference to The Man Store and I got credit to buy my first suit, 2-piece suit to graduate from high school in.

BE: Cobbles'—where was that located?

KS: It was down there on the left side going out, where that His 'n' Her Rock Shop was, next door to Roses. At that time Roses was open and there was a Jewish man, his name was Isaac—I went to school with his son Hal Isaac—his dad owned a clothing store down there.

KL: Do you remember the name of it?

KS: No, I don't. But he was a Jew and his last name was Isaac. Hal went up to New York and died up there-- I graduated with him. His dad owned that clothing store.

BE: And where was it located?

KS: Beside Roses down there. I guess it was right there near where that His 'n' Her Rock Shop, and Schultz—there was a shoe store there, or a cobbler that repaired shoes.

BE: That was probably. . .what—Edwards Shoe Shop?

KS: I think it was.

BE: You remember a fellow named Lum Edwards, he lived on Belmont?

KS: Yes, I went to school with his son, can't think of his name, but it was Edwards. And then Schultz got it, right? Another man, after Edwards retired.

BE: Did a lot of teenagers hang out at the Palace?

KS: Yes, yes. That was one of the places they liked to go to get a Coke or as soda, or a cone of ice cream. And they would stand there and talk, or sit down, you know. Some of them would get a little rowdy and of course Doc Foster would get up and quieten them down. But that's where they gathered. I don't know about the other drug stores. . .all of them had soda fountains back then. See, you don't have no drug stores now that have soda fountains. Even B & B, you know, they moved theirs out of there. Drug stores over in town, like Montford Pharmacy, they had a soda fountain at one time over there, and Barefoot & Tatum. . .all these drug stores on these streets, like Charlotte Street—there were two drug stores out there. That was, I guess for a young person, that was the ideal place to go to meet your friends and maybe buy a girl a Coke or a cone of ice cream. That was popular back then.

BE: Since you always worked there, where did you go just to hang out?

KS: Well, we didn't have a juke box in the drug store, and we would go over town after I'd close my drug store; we'd go over there at the Pack Square Pharmacy, and park on the Square. They had a juke box, and they stayed open til midnight. And we'd go over there and play the juke box. Or, there was a little diner or café out here towards Enka, next to Asheville School, called The Banner—no, the Banner Café was out here on Haywood Road—

BE: The Beacon.

KS: --the Beacon,that's right, the Beacon Restaurant. And we'd go out there, we knew the girls that worked out there and we'd go out there and set there, maybe eat. . . we didn't serve french fries but they did and we'd maybe get a order of french fries or a milkshake or something, cup of coffee, and sit out there til they closed—we'd close it down for them! But you know, after that, it was time to go home and get some rest. Especially since we were still in school.

KL: Oh, yes.

KS: It'd be midnight before I got home, and got in my bed, you know--after midnight.

KL: How did you get out there?

KS: The busses ran late.

KL: They did?

KS: That's another thing. They run til. . .the last bus left uptown about 12:00 (p.m.) I would catch . . .11:30, 11:35 or so, I would catch the bus out there in front of the store, and ride down to Wellington Street, and sometimes I'd walk. Wasn't scared to walk after midnight on the streets back then. Sure would be tonight.

KL: Do you remember any. . .crimes happening in those years that were really notorious?

KS: Not out here. Maybe some car accidents, that would really disturb you if you saw them. But not necessarily out here in West Asheville. I've seen some bad car wrecks on Tunnel Road, like these fast cars, Thunderbirds and all that, crash into something and kill people.

BE: Do you remember. . . the polio epidemic started in the 40s and went up into the early 50s. . .do you recall that?

KS: We had a couple I went to high school with that had come down with polio. We always dreaded that. See, we didn't have that many bad diseases. . .cancer was what my mother died with. I hadn't ever heard the word "cancer" until 1946, that's when she passed away. I was 10 years old. She had breast cancer. But we heard of tuberculosis—TB, from the lungs, and polio, was the only two major diseases at that time. Of course all of us broke our arms or something like that during our childhood. . .I had my tonsils removed. It was the only time I've ever been in the hospital, when I started school. . .of course, I broke my right wrist, climbed up on a fence and fell down on the other side, all my weight went down on my right arm there and broke my wrist. You'd see a couple of polio victims that we went to school with, but there weren't that many around that I knew of.

KL: So working in the pharmacy you didn't hear that much about people with (polio)?

KS: No. I knew it was out there, but I didn't know but maybe two, like I say, two of the students I went to school with that might have had it.

BE: Do you recall Bobby Owens?

KS: That's the one I was thinking about.

BE: You were in school with him?

KS: Seems like he passed away about the time I moved here. I know his mother, and Bill. Of course, Bill, he has a bad leg. I think it was from polio, too.

BE: Right.

KS: I was talking to his mother not long ago, over at K-Mart. She was telling me he went up to Canada somewhere. He retired from the state. But he and my brother Joe played football down at Hall Fletcher together. They never did think that he would be able to run enough, you know, to play football, but he went out there and played.

BE: Bill.

KS: Yes, Bill. Now Bob, I really didn't (know). See, their Dad was a highway patrolman. Of course he's long passed away too. But Bob would've been the same age I am. We have so many fond memories of Haywood Road—all the businesses. I always went down and visited with them on my lunch hour.

KL: What do you think about the most when you look back on West Asheville in those days?

KS: Up until here the last few years, of course, we had heavy traffic out here on Haywood Road. . .we're getting it back now, during the rush hour after work, you know—I'd say from 3:30 til 5 or 5:30, you've got a lot of traffic out here. Patton Avenue took away a lot of that traffic, when they added the extra lanes and that extra bridge. I've got a postcard at home somewhere or another, Patton Avenue, that Smoky Park Bridge, is only 2 or 3 lanes—one bridge, before they added the other one. And there weren't that many businesses on Patton Avenue. Like Sky City, they were probably the first ones to start building and then, of course, K-Mart came along, and some of the others, and filling stations. We had plenty of them on Haywood Road.

KL: Tell me the name of every filling station on Haywood Road.

KS: OK, we had Pure Oil Station down here at Haywood Road and Sandhill Road—that was Pure oil, Mr. Randolph run it, and we had an Amoco here at the corner of Vermont Avenue—that Amoco was an Esso (E-S-S-O) before they changed when Standard Oil bought them and changed it to Exxon. . .and then we had Atlantic-- Gene Johnson run that—right where the bank is now, and we had of course Cal Marshall's Amoco. He had a wrecker service there in his filling station—gas station, service station. And then down at Beecham Curve was another Pure Oil station—Mr. Shook, Red Shook and his son Bill ran that, down at Beecham Curve.

KL: What do you remember being between that station and the river, headed down Haywood Road?

KS: A barber shop. . .I don't know. . .there wasn't any laundromats at that time. I can remember when the first laundromat ws built down there, and then car washes. . .the first car wash was out on Patton Avenue. But down there, a barber shop. . .the first barber shop, I think we got a haircut for 35 or 50 cents. There might have been some electrical company down there. Of course, Crawford much business there, on down to the bridge. Of course, the west end had several businesses.

BE: Do you remember a little café that used to be down there—it was where the beauty shop is now—it was called "Peg's Café" or "Peggy's Café"?

KS: At Beecham Curve?

BE: Yes, it was right where that beauty shop is today.

KS: Mrs. Nelson run it. . .I don't know the name of her café, but I used to eat there before I come to work. Mrs. Nelson. She had. . . on Thursdays she worked at the stockyards, sold beans and things down there for the people that went to the stockyards, down there at the river.

KL: How did that work? Did she have a booth—was there a place for her?

KS: There must have been a little stand, like, and she sold her sandwiches and pinto beans, soup beans.

KL: Did lots of people. . .was she the only person who did that?

KS: You know, I don't know if she was the only one who did that or not. She was the only one I knew.

BE: Now this Mrs. Nelson, did she live in West Asheville?

KS: Yes, she lived up here on—it was either Clinton or Covington Street, but she had that one down there on Haywood Road And Mr. Hunt would always come to her and fuss about. . .she would feed the children and they wouldn't buy nothing from the lunch room, you know, and they were buying it on credit too, sometimes!

BE: Now, this was a very small café?

KS: Yes, I don't know how many it seated, She had—of course, the counter had stools, and she had a few tables, booths, or something. It was small.

BE: Do you recall her first name?

KS: No, I don't. I'll have to find out her first name, but she's passed away since. She . . . I guess lived in West Asheville all of her life.

BE: What was the most memorable event from the time you worked at the Palace Pharmacy til the time you graduated? Can you think of anything really memorable?

KS: Outside of making a lot of friends, you know, and maybe double dating before I got married. They started filming movies around here—that. . . Robert Mitchum's "Thunder Road". They filmed that back in '57 or '58. I got to meet his son Jimmy. And all the girls I went to school with, they had small parts in it. Of course, Farmer Russ, he was a radio announcer—WWNC or WSKY?

BE: WSKY.

KS: WSKY. He had a part in it, up there at The Sky Club, up there on Beaucatcher Mountain. They filmed some up there. And we'd go—they'd put it in the paper, where they were going to film. We'd go out here on Brevard Road and watch the road races. And I was talking to Junior Kuykendall not long ago—he used to fix up cars, like the '50 Fords, and the '49s, and the Plymouths and the Chevrolets. And him and his friends would loan them cars, or sell them, to the movie people, And Robert Mitchum would drive them—they'd run liquor and all that, you know (out)running the law. But every morning before I went to work, if they were scheduled to film out here, I would try to be out there to watch them, somewhere. Of course, like I say, we didn't have that much entertainment, after, you know, you'd seen all the movies and got tired of bowling. So I got up a dance class at Fletcher School of Dancing, some of my buddies and I. I said, "Now they want a sort of large class." We started with four couples—two couples, I think, or three couples. It wound up with about a dozen couples, time we quit. It was in the wintertime, and we'd got tired bowling, like I say, and seen all the movies, so We wanted something else to do, you know, to keep us occupied on the nights that I was off. So on Wednesday nights that I was off, we'd take our dance lessons. I got to meet a lot of young people and ladies—girls—that worked at the banks—

KL: I bet that was a lot of fun.

KS: --and they would bring their friends, and boyfriends—something like that. We had a class, a ballroom dance class, that I had got started, and it did real well. We went way up in the year on that. We'd go home on Saturday night and turn "Lawrence Welk" on the TV, you know, and we'd practice, and then go back Wednesday and have another class. We had several instructors. Of course, there's where Miss America came from—Maria Beale Fletcher! I met her when she was 15 or 16. We all just piled on her to dance with her, you know—keep her busy dancing, when she'd visit us. They'd take us home one night a month—have a party for us. And they had a dance floor built on the side of their house over there on Governor's View Road, and we'd have a little party, dancing over there.

BE: Now, you talked about double-dating. . .was this with your wife, or prior to your wife. . .?

KS: Well, prior and with my wife.

BE: Do you remember some of the girls you dated?

KS: Well yes!

BE: Were they West Asheville girls?

KS: Some was. Some that I had crushes on that I didn't date, I wished I had of asked them for a date! I didn't date them, but I would pick the ones that was most popular in school, too. I would ask a cheerleader and the majorette, and band members I knew. But most. . .some of them, I didn't go to school with—they went maybe to Sandhill High School, or maybe another county school. My wife, she went to Erwin High School. But I sort of picked the girls that. . .well, naturally, I wanted a pretty girl, you know! And I'd even borrow a car, you know—a better car than I had, just to go out on that date!

BE: What did you do on these dates—that you can talk about?!

KS: Well, we went to drive-in movies. That's when we had the one out there on Tunnel Road, and we had one out there in West Asheville, towards Enka, there—West Asheville Drive-In. Had one right behind, before they built the 240 interstate out there—The Starlight, out there on Tunnel Road. Either that, or we'd go bowling, mostly. . .I think I proposed to my wife at the Dreamland Drive-In one night! I bought the ring, you know—I knew her size, and I went ahead and bought the ring. . .

BE: If you went out to eat on a date, where did you go?

KS: That's a good question. I liked to go to Buck's Restaurant. They had a restaurant on the inside, outside of that drive-in, you know. There wasn't that many. . .there wasn't any steak houses back then. You had Babe Maloy's, they had a dining room, and Buck's, of course. And the rest of them were just drive-throughs, drive-ins, like. Of course, working people always eat out here at the Banner Café, or H.B. Bradley's restaurant on Patton Avenue. And then there was a Greek restaurant out here, across the street where the outdoor—

BE: Right. Now Bradley's, that used to be a pretty big hangout, because seems like Tunnel Road closed at 11:00 or 12:00, and Bradley's stayed open until 1:00. So essentially between 12:00 (p.m.) and 1:00 (a.m.) they did a big business. . .?

KS: Oh yes, yes.

BE: I can't remember who owned that—seems like it was a Ward fellow who owned it.

KS: I didn't know him. But, we had, of course, the S & W Cafeteria during the daytime, up there across from Pritchard Park. But there wasn't any fast food! McDonald's was the first one to come to Asheville, on Tunnel Road. And then they didn't have a dining room at that time.

KL: Strictly a drive-through?

KS: Yes. Or you could go out, stand there at the window, and order. Then Burger King. I believe Wendy's was about the last one to come to Asheville, and Hardee's. Don't know which came first, but I know it was McDonald's and then Burger King. And they were on Tunnel Road, too, at one time—their first store, I believe, before they put a store on Patton Avenue.

BE: OK. Where we are now, in the West Asheville Community Center, do you remember when this was first referred to as the West Asheville Youth Center, and

then the West Asheville Teen Center?

KS: Yes, yes.

BE: Did you ever come out here?

KS: Yes, we did. Had a juke box, and young people would come out and dance. I don't know if they served refreshments—I don't believe they did.

BE: Do you remember the lady that ran the program?

KS: Yes, her husband was a mailman, and I can't think of her name. She's passed away.

BE: Young, wasn't it?

KS: Yes, Mrs, Young, that's right. That's right.

BE: Did you spend very much time out here?

KS: When I was off from work. Of course, I only get two nights off a week, Wednesday and Friday. They were closed by the time I closed my drug store and got out of there at 11:30 at night, and naturally, you'd want your young people to be at home at that time.

BE: Did you ever bring a date out here?

KS: No, I knew a lot of the boys and girls that met out here. While I was working I loaned this girl my car and she come down here and she took this boy home that lived on Clinton Avenue, and they finally got married! So I'm responsible maybe for that! This Dr. Fred Warehan, the preacher, I introduced him to his wife. She lived behind the drug store—Pat Henry. He was bashful and shy, and we got him to ask her out, to a movie or something, and so they got to going together and got married.

BE: What years were you coming here when it was the Teen Center? Would it have been in the 50s?

KS: Yes, it was in the 50s. In the 60s, I was in the military—I had got drafted in May of '59. I was already married—I got married in November of '58. I'd only been married like, 5 months when I got drafted, and only been working at Biltmore Dairy about 3 1/2 months when I had to go in—2 years regular army and 4 years reserve.

KL: Were you overseas 2 years?

KS: I served 1 year over in Korea—my last year regular army, over in Korea. I belong to the VFW, Post 891, out on the Leicester Highway.

KL: Did you come right back to Asheville when you got out?

KS: Oh yes. Yes, I've never lived anywhere else, except the 2 years I was away in the military. I was down at Fort Jackson, and Fort Raleigh, Kansas, and overseas, and then came back to West Asheville, and I've been here ever since.

KL: So on the whole, you've been pretty well satisfied with West Asheville?

KS: Yes. It's not a large community—we don't have that many shopping. . .well, except K-Mart. Of course the drug stores, they changed real fast, like when Eckerd's started coming in—these franchises. . .then K-Mart put a pharmacy in when they moved here. Sky City never did have a pharmacy. That kindly ran the family businesses out.

BE: Did you live on Vermont when you got married?

KS: Yes I did. And then we rented a little bungalow on Virginia Avenue, and we stayed there until I went in the army. And when I came out (my wife, she went back home to her mother and father), we rented a house on Oakwood Street, and then from Oakwood Street to Cub Road, where we're living now. So I haven't had too many addresses.

BE: Yes, you've been in the vicinity most of the time!

KS: Yes, that's right. Right here. The first address on Vermont Avenue was down there with Mr. E. V. Roberts—he was a real estate man. He built this office building where Dr. Sommerville had an office.

BE: At the top of Vermont?

KS: Yes. There was a dentist, and Dr. Sommerville, when he came to Asheville. They built out at Sandhill and didn't have enough room to rent efficiency apartments, so I went up to 48 there, on the corner of Vance Crescent and Vermont Avenue. Stayed there until I got married and we rented this house, a little bungalow, at 52 ½ Virginia Avenue; then stayed there until I got drafted. Then we came back and rented a house at 57 Oakwood Street. Stayed there about 4 years, and bought out on Cub Road.

KL: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your life?

KS: You know I didn't write down notes--there probably are (some things) which I maybe haven't thought about in years. I do think about these people that I've met and known . . .friends, and the good times that you share when you start working at 15. That's young to go to work—15 or 16, full-time, like I did, and stayed with the job. I've only had 3 jobs in 49 years!

KL: Have you ever regretted working so much and working so young?

KS: I thought about it not long ago; there's advantages and disadvantages. I've never been one to jump from one job to another, or quit because I got mad and was tired of working. I just struggled through it, if I had a problem, and settled it. And of course I may have. . .should have chosen professional work. I would have been a salaried person. I've always been paid by the hour—hourly pay. But no, thinking back, my life has been interesting and happy, I would say, and of course, I could have gone to school as a pharmacist—at that time it was only 4 years, Doc Foster wanted to send me to a school of pharmacy, but I fooled around in high school, didn't get my classes I really needed, and didn't have the money to buy clothes. . . He would have paid my tuition, I'm sure, he talked about that he'd like to see me go on, you know, further my education. But when I got on down at Biltmore Dairy, we were making good money, even as a salesman, back then

KL: Was that hard work?

KS: Yes.

BE: You delivered, right? Where was your delivery (route)?

KS: I started—my first route was over at Emma and Leicester. And I only got to work 3 months on that route til I got drafted in the army. Well, I was away 2 years. So they put me on a route over in West End when I come out of the army—West End, Clingman Avenue, over across West Chestnut, over there on Merrimon

Avenue. I stayed on that 10 months, and then the supervisor put me out on Charlotte Street and Grove Park; I stayed on that until I left. Of course, they'd take off some, they'd add some. They put me out in Fairview the last year I was with them—Oakley, and different (routes). But I had North Asheville, Grove Park, for about 19 years, 18 years, something like that.

BE: So you never had a route in West Asheville?

KS: No, never did work a route in West Asheville, I started on Patton Avenue and went over in Emma, North Louisiana, and over across Craggy Bridge and over to Leicester. We had the opportunity to transfer when there was a route available—open. But I chose to stay over in Grove Park—I made so many friends, and of course, there was a lot I served milk to that I went to school with, that was doctors and lawyers that I knew, and they bought from me, they traded with me, And it turned out, you know, I met a lot of professional people, business men and women-- real estate, and car dealers.

KL: We've got to ask you—what are you going to do after you retire?

KS: Well, I have thought about 2 different things that I've wanted to do for years and never had the time to do it: drive a tour bus—I'd like to take people on tours—

KL: I bet you'd be great!

KS: In the army, I learned to drive a bus, in Kansas—I drove in the military, and then. . . . I like to talk, so I want to be a radio announcer part-time too. You know, sometime or another when they need me to fill in, cause I've had a lot of friends—Bob Hooper, that I graduated with, from West Asheville, used to be down there in Greenville on the radio—

BE: WESC

KS: --WESC. We graduated together.

BE: So where are you talking about doing radio?

KS: I've talked to them out there in Black Mountain, WFGW, that's Billy Graham's—he started that in 1963. It's the Blue Ridge Broadcasting System. Years ago you to—I've got friends that had to go down to Tennessee to get their broadcasting license. But now you can get them, on-the-job training, if they test you out and you can talk on the microphone.

KL: Well you can!

KS: I wouldn't be one that would read the news, because I can't pronounce all these new—

KL: Nobody can these days!

KS: --names from overseas. I didn't even know where Vietnam was when I came back from Korea.

KL: A lot of us were just finding out.

KS: Yes. And now there's a lot of places that you see on the news. . .when we'd go to the movies, they'd show a few minutes of a newsreel, about Germany or Japan, you know, we knew about that, France, we'd read that in the history books before the war, during the war. We knew where that was located, geographically.

KL: Familiar with those places.

KS: Yes. But not Korea. Well, I learned about Korea when I was in high school. I

wasn't in the war. During (my) high school years, they were fighting—they were in that war, and they settled it before I graduated, so I went over there during peacetime. But I am still a veteran of Korea.

KL: Mr. Smith, we have really enjoyed talking with you, and if you come up with any more pictures, or have time to sit down and write down some of your memories, We would love to have a copy of it.

KS: I'd like to have a copy of all that you have compiled about West Asheville, the history. . .it is historic little community. We don't call it West Asheville anymore, you know. My mail, it's all Asheville, and your street address. When I used to get letters and cards from people who had moved off, family or friends, they'd always put "West Asheville". With this zip code, we don't have to do that anymore.

KL: No, but a lot of people still think of West Asheville as a very distinct place.

KS: This is where 50 years I have spent. . .you know, out of my 65. . . .this is the most. I guess you'd call me a tarheel, instead of a West Virginia hillbilly!

BE: You're all <u>but</u> homegrown!

Interview Research

The Palace Pharmacy first appears in the 1931 Asheville City Directory. Dan'l. V. Foster and G.A. Shieder are listed as owners. The address is 783 Haywood Road (in the Bledsoe Building, 771-783 Haywood Road).

The 1944 Asheville City Directory lists a Negro Dispensary operated by Dr. Mary Shuford at 269 College St., and also the YMI Drug Store at 29 Eagle St. The 1953 City Directory no longer lists the Negro Dispensary, though Dr. Shuford is still listed, with an office at 10 Pack Square. The YMI Drug Store is still listed in 1953, at the same address (29 Eagle St.).

The 1953 Asheville City Directory lists Mrs. Eula Ramey as a saleswoman at the Palace Pharmacy, with a residence on Sandhill Road.

The Banner (Café). There is a listing in the 1948-49 Asheville City Directory for "The Banner Refreshment Stand" at 745 Haywood Road. Henry B. Bradley is listed as owner. The 1953 Asheville City Directory lists the Banner at 746 Haywood Road and shows E.M. Moore to be the owner.

The 1953 Asheville City Directory lists Mrs. Emma B. Nelson as a waitress at the Stock Yard Café, with a residence at 127 Fairfax Avenue. The directory lists the Stock Yard Café as being on Lyman St., no number given. The owner is Mrs. Ruby Llewellyn; residence, 14 Cowan Road, WA.

The 1953 Asheville City Directory lists "Peggy's Grill" at 295 Haywood Road.; owner is Roy L. Sparks. Sparks and wife Peggy lived at 73 Deaver St., WA.

The 1953 Asheville City Directory lists Babe Maloy's Drive In at 26 Tunnel Rd; owner, Geo. C. Maloy.

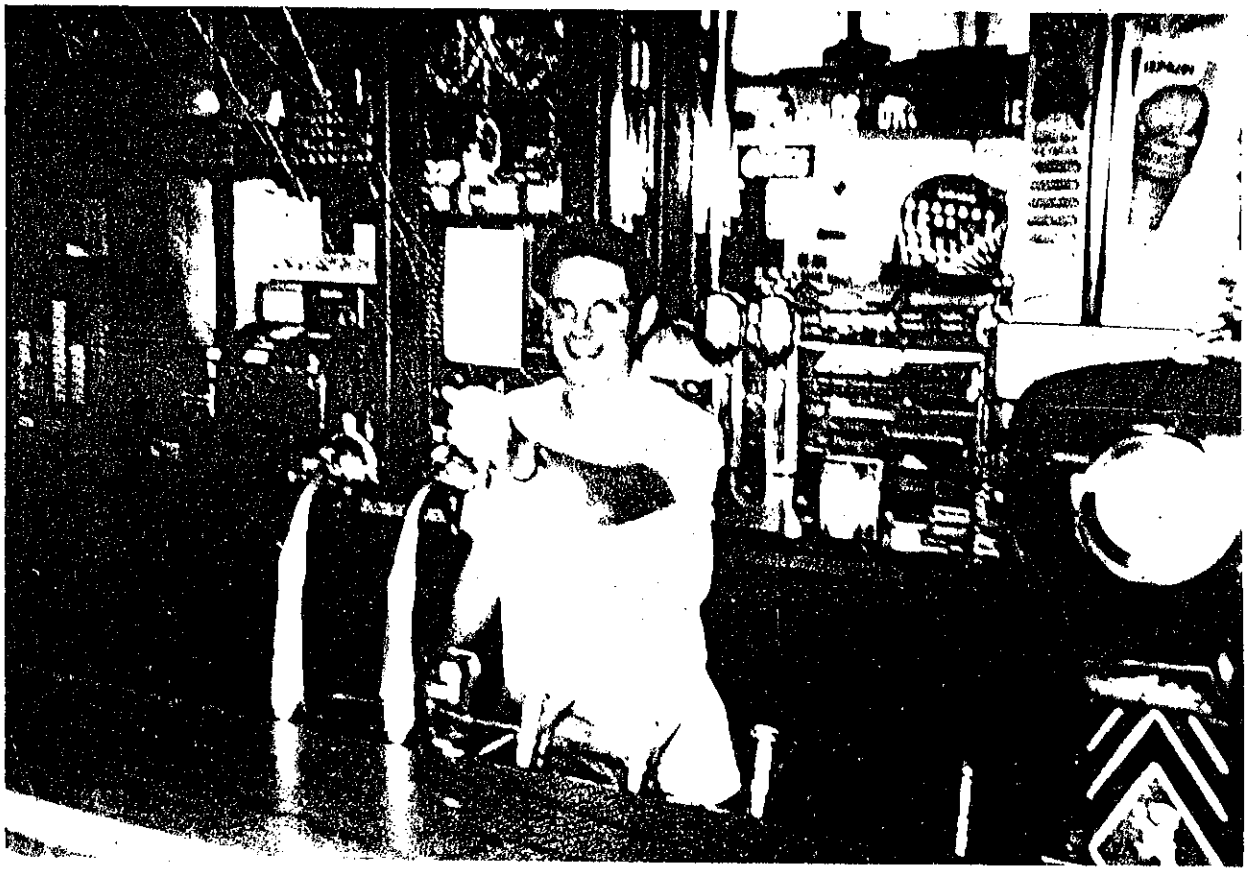
The 1944 Asheville city Directory lists Zephyr Hill Sanitorium at 216 Shelburne Road, WA. It is still listed in 1953.

The 1953 Asheville city Directory lists Dr. George H. Carrell, dentist, at 775a Haywood Road; residence, 23 Harvard Pl., WA.

The 1953 Asheville City Directory lists Dr. Scott S. Fay at 5 Mildred Avenue; home, 94 Brevard Road.

The 1953 Asheville City Directory lists Riley W. Smith as a salesman with Matthews Motor Sales Inc., at 100 Coxe Avenue; home, 61 Dunwell Ave., WA.

"Doc" Daniel Foster at the prescription counter, Palace Pharmacy, 783 Haywood Road, 50s.



Kermit Smith behind the counter at the soda fountain, Palace Pharmacy, 783 Haywood Road, 50s. Kermit Smith photo.

Kermit Smith on delivery bicycle outside Palace Pharmacy, 783 Haywood Road, WA, early 50s. Kermit Smith photo.

Kermit Smith outside the Palace Pharmacy, 783 Haywood Road, WA, 1950s. Kermit Smith photo.

AUG 1957

Above: Kermit Smith in uniform outside Palace Pharmacy, August 1957. Kermit Smith photo.

Below: Geraldine Banks, the future Mrs. Kermit Smith, outside the Bledsoe building, April 1958. Kermit Smith photo.

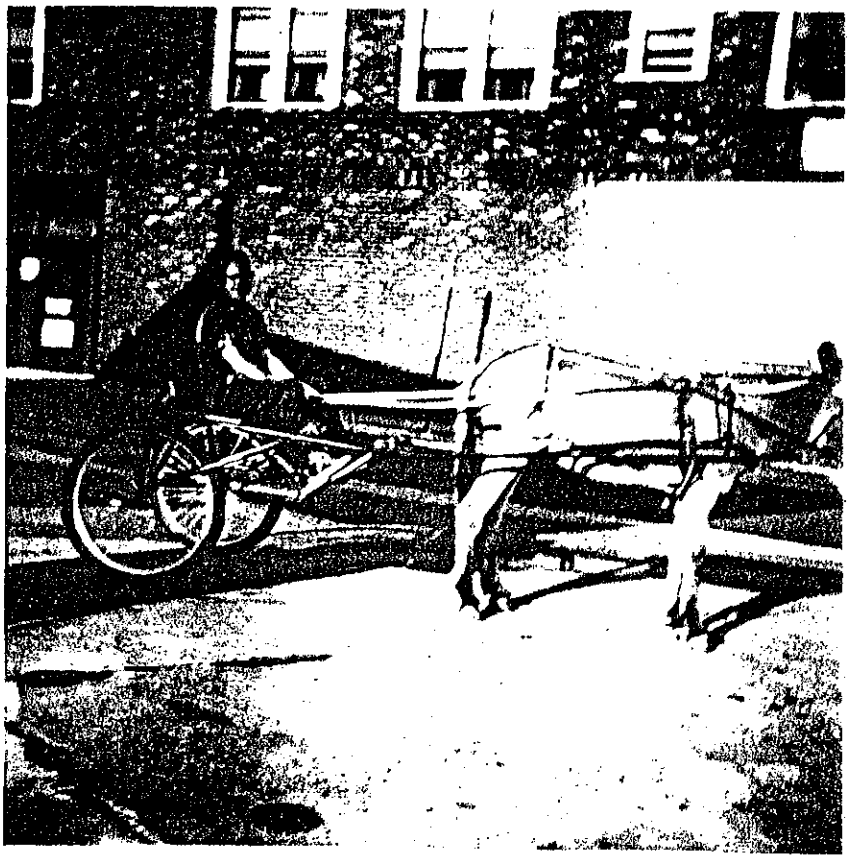
APR 1958

Kermit Smith, Mildred Avenue, early 50s. Kermit Smith photo.

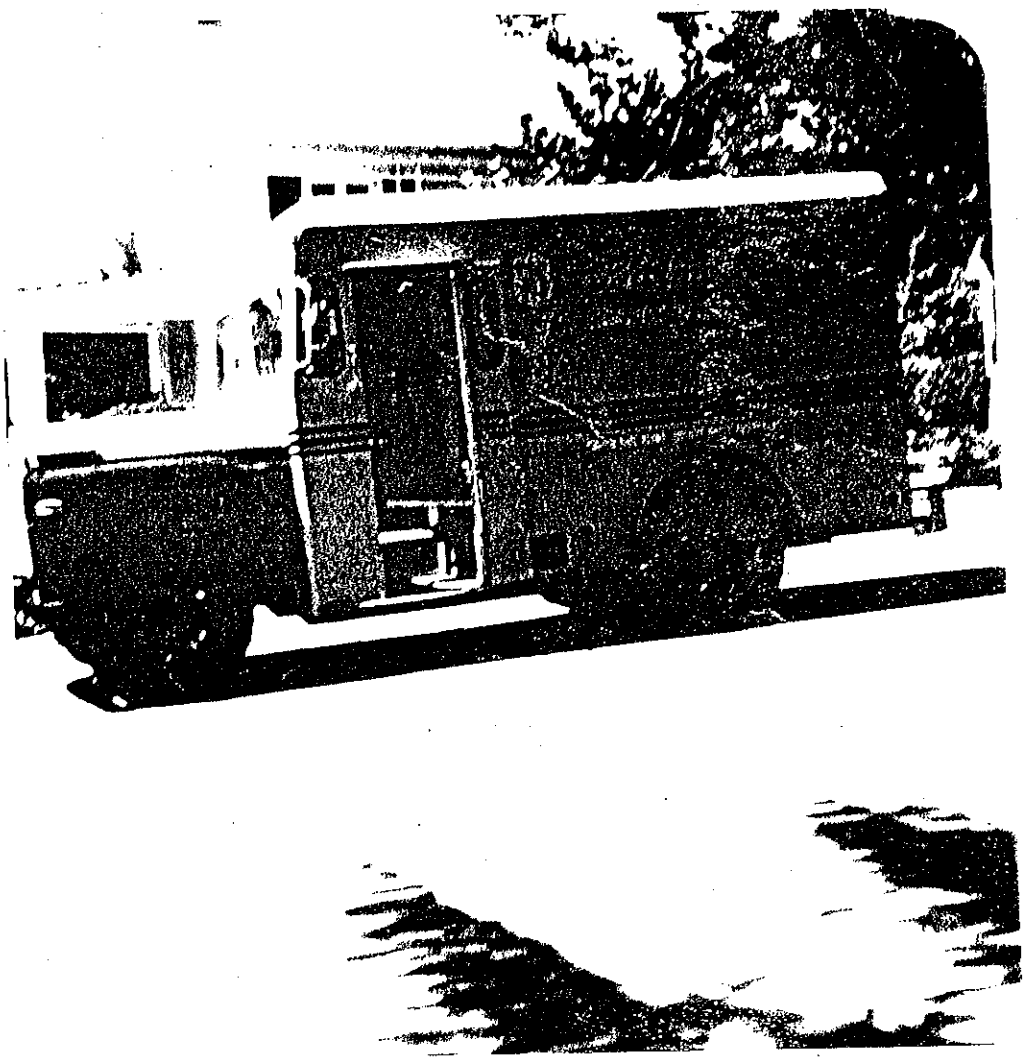
JUNE 1958

Douglas Kuykendall, nephew of Doc Foster, in front of Palace Pharmacy, 783 Haywood Road, WA, June 1958. He has just won the '58 Edsel he's leaning on--he won it in the raffle advertised on sign in background. Kermit Smith photo.

"Chubby" Ingle, pharmacist, Pinner's Drug Store, 619 Haywood Road, WA, 1952 or 1953. Kermit Smith photo.



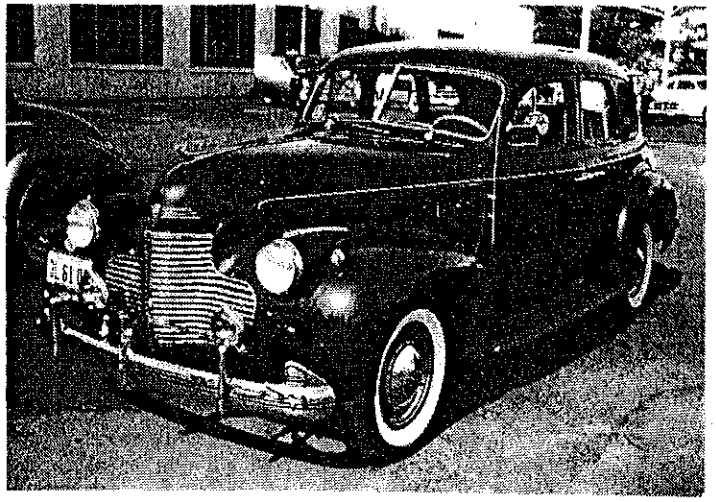
Pinner's Drug Store exterior, June 1958. Kermit Smith photo.



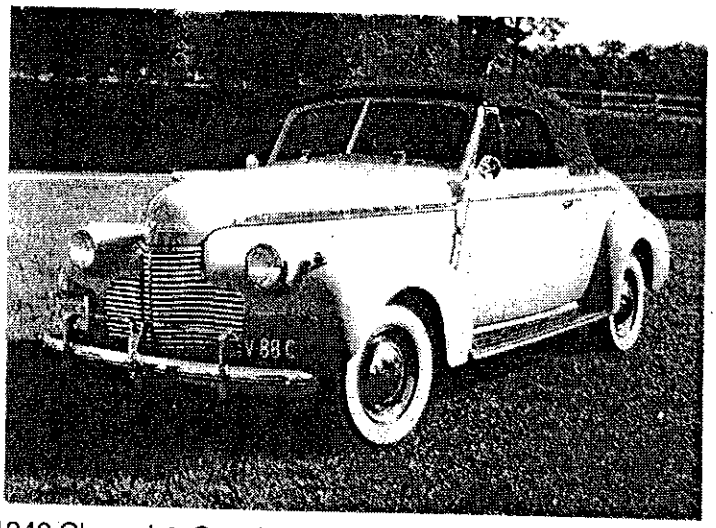
Kermit Smith's Biltmore Dairy Truck, 1959. Kermit Smith photo.

AUG 1958

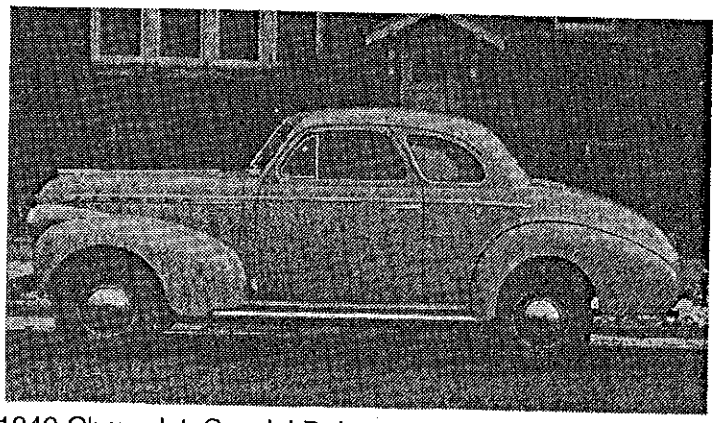
Hall Fletcher football team, August 1958, Joe "Tommy" Smith, brother of Kermit Smith, in foreground. Coach Joe Eblen in shirtsleeves behind Tommy to the left. Kermit Smith photo.



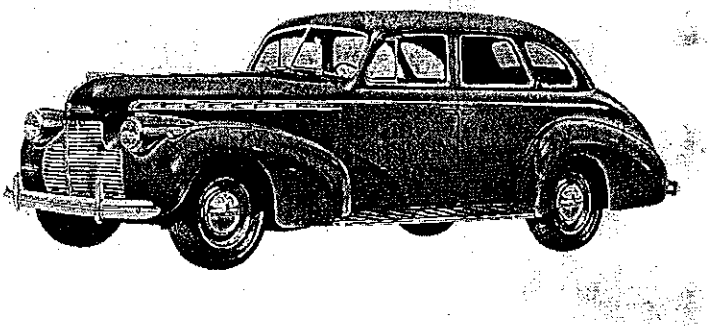
1940 Chevrolet, Master DeLuxe, four-door sedan, OCW



1940 Chevrolet, Special DeLuxe, convertible coupe, OCW



1940 Chevrolet, Special DeLuxe, coupe, JAC



1940 Chevrolet, Special Deluxe, sport sedan, PH

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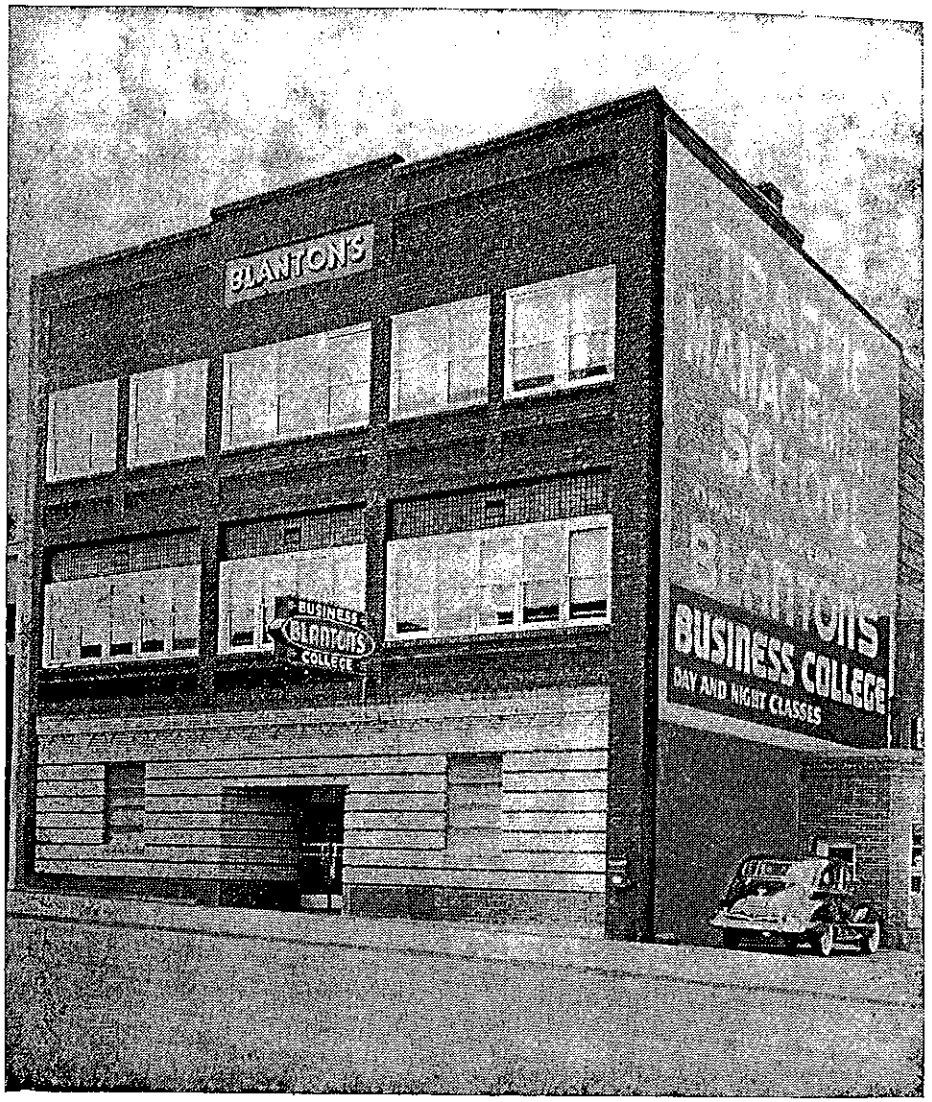

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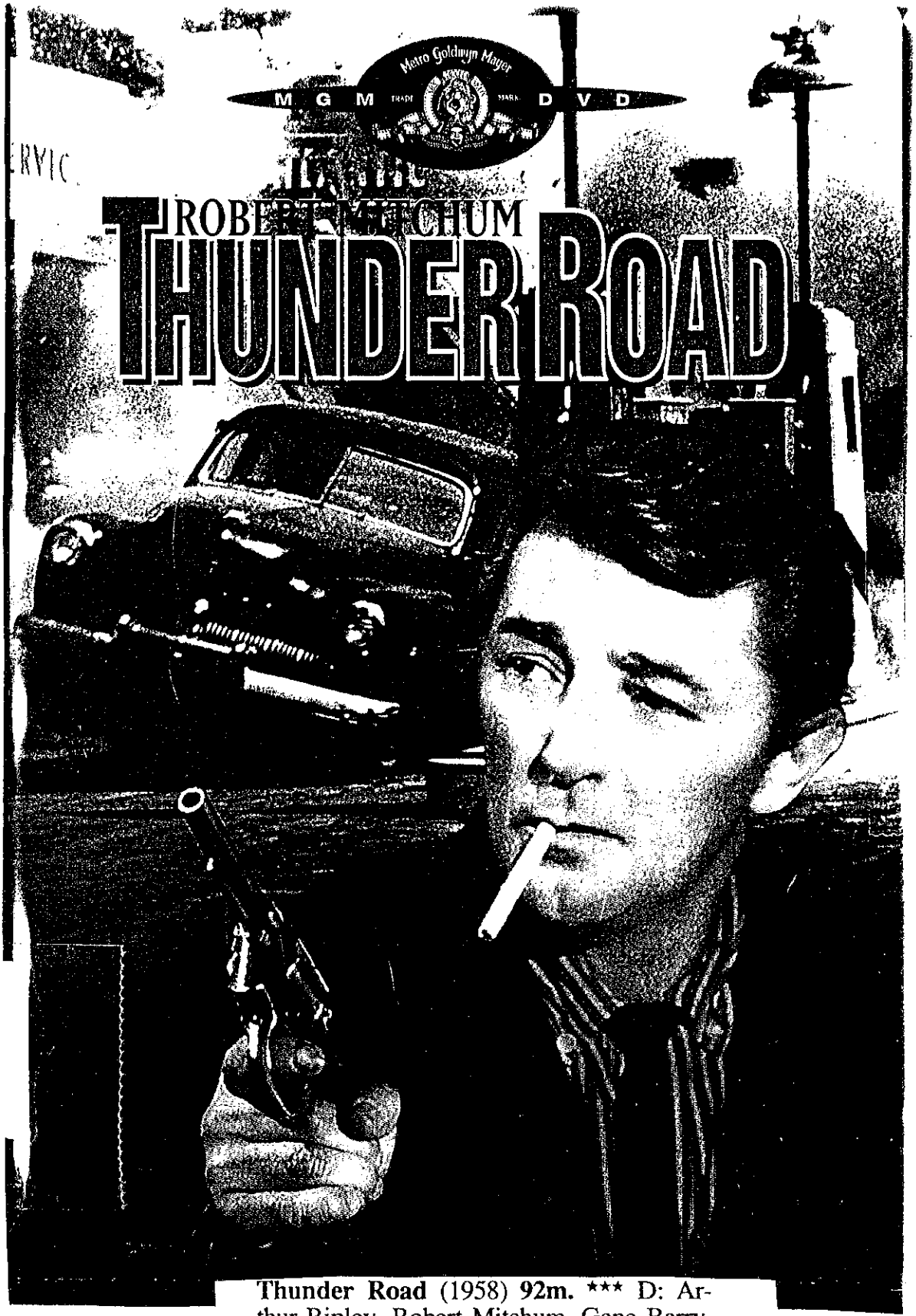

Thunder Road (1958) **92m.** *** D: Arthur Ripley. Robert Mitchum, Gene Barry, Jacques Aubuchon, Keely Smith, James Mitchum. Rural bootlegger takes on Feds *and* the Mob in cult favorite that even today continues to play in drive-ins; for many this remains the definitive moonshine picture. Jim Mitchum makes screen debut playing Bob's *brother;* the elder Mitchum got a hit record out of the title tune, which he also wrote!

VISITING OUR PAST

Tunnel Road was the Sixties' 'in' place for teen-agers

By Rob Neufeld
SPECIAL TO THE CITIZEN-TIMES

ASHEVILLE — On the May 6, 1961 weekend that Alan B. Shepard Jr. returned from space and exclaimed, "Boy, what a ride!" Asheville teens were drag racing at the just abandoned old airport and girls were getting their hair sculpted into trendy beehive and candle glow styles.

A dollar an hour was a good wage and, putting in 10 hours a week at an after-school job, a lucky boy or girl could act the sport at Tunnel Road drive-ins and downtown shops. "I can't tell you how many times we pooled our coins and bought 50 cents worth of gas to 'check the drag' at Buck's, Wink's and Babe's," recalls Kathy Sanford Petrucelli about Tunnel Road's offerings.

Minimum wage didn't enable most kids to own cars, and cars were critical — for freedom, sociability, kicks and status. Writer and Alexander Books publisher Ralph Roberts comments, "If you had a '57 Chevy, it didn't matter whether you were cool or not — you were cool." In two ways, Roberts was part of an alternate cool — not the main "in" crowd. He attended Erwin High School, not Lee Edwards; and his interests tended toward books and ham radios.

"I was alternate cool, but the big melting pot was Buck's and Wink's," Roberts says, linking the two spots, as they and Babe Maloy's drive-in were part of a circuit. Thanks to the management skills of his brother Alfred and his wife Sue, J.O. "Buck" Buchanan was able to give his full attention to his customers, both the civic leaders in the Red Carpet Room and the teens at the curbs.

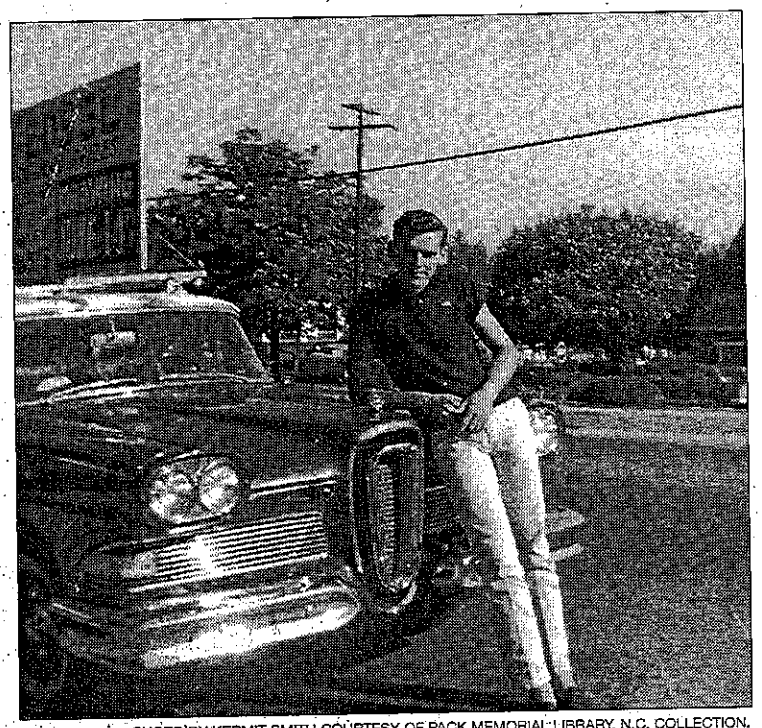

PHOTO BY KERMIT SMITH COURTESY OF PACK MEMORIAL LIBRARY, N.C. COLLECTION.

Douglas Kuykendall, a friend of Roy Kermit Smith, is shown posing by the 1958 Edsel he'd won in a raffle sponsored by the West Asheville Business Association.

"When I was 16, I got a ticket for going the wrong way on a one-way road," recalls Mary Ray Byrd, whose father, L. Ray Davis, owned the Shamrock Court Motel on Tunnel Road. "I was panicked. I had a yellow '65 Corvair then, and to whom did I go? I went to Buck, and he took care of my ticket." The Rays, who lived in the Beverly Hills neighborhood of east Asheville, sent Mary to St. Genevieve's, a private school, rather than Lee Edwards because they wanted the school bus to drop her off protectively at their doorstep.

Mary was one of many girls who made efforts to be cool, which, she said, was done more to impress other girls than boys. "My hair was curly and thick," she notes. "Mother paid for me to have a reverse permanent. Sometimes, I had my girlfriends put my hair on an ironing board and iron it."

"It took me one hour to get my curly hair smooth and big," says Deane Johnson Nesbitt. The hair went along with wrap-around burgundy skirts and Weejuns shoes. Once, Singleton poured peroxide on her head to lighten her hair. It lightened to a shocking orange. Her rollers-and-scarf disguise kept the disgrace from her parents until Sunday dinner came along and all head coverings had to come off.

The pull of Tunnel Road was great. Petrucelli once broke a family rule when she let a girlfriend, borrowing her father's car, drive her to Wink's instead of to The Beacon in Enka. "We decided to make a request at the Melody Tower," Petrucelli writes, "we had the request all written out when Susan was distracted by a cool '57 Chevy and the guys driving it." She hit the tower, and the WISE D.J. swore, "I believe the tunnel just caved in!"

Teens from the western part of the county — "country kids," Tunnel Road's "in" crowd remarked, seeing some drive up in their jalopies — had drive-ins, movie theatres and drug stores with soda fountains to which to go, and they did. But, in Asheville in the 1950s, community was getting larger. You could watch American Bandstand on TV, buy a transistor radio from Sears, take a bus from school to Woolworth's downtown to listen to 45s before buying them, and, of course, you could drive.

An Asheville Citizen editorial stated in 1961, "It may be more than coincidence that the Rock 'n Roll shows normally bypass Asheville on their swings about the country. Few cities are similarly blessed with such a wealth of opportunities to enjoy superior music."

Yet, Mary Elinor Nailling, despite the purist taste for classical music of her father, Dr. Richard Nailling, became an avid rock 'n roll listener, supplied with free 45s by her father's nurse's boyfriend. (A Buddy Holly disk was Mary's first.) It didn't hurt that her maternal grandmother, Mary Catherine "Nanna" Dempsey, loved Elvis.

Roy Kermit Smith of West Asheville loved to go to the Asheville Auditorium for late-into-the-night gospel sings. Yet that didn't exclude his seeking out the jukebox at Pack Square Pharmacy or taking a date to Dreamland Drive-In Theatre on Tunnel Road, despite the fact that fast driving there sometimes resulted in fatal accidents. For after all, the late 50s was the era of "Thunder Road," the movie about bootlegging that was shot in Asheville and starred Robert Mitchum.

"We'd go out here on Brevard Road and watch the road races," Smith told Karen Loughmiller in an interview she did for the West Asheville Library's history project. "Junior Kuykendall ... and his friends would lend their cars, or sell them, to the movie people, and Robert Mitchum would drive them."

Smith and his buddies often looked for entertainment. When they tired of bowling, they took dance lessons at Fletcher School of Dancing. "We'd go home on Saturday night and turn 'Lawrence Welk' on the TV and we'd practice, and then go back Wednesday and have another class." Several times, they got to dance with the future Miss America, 16-year old Maria Beale Fletcher.

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